

Message Text

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SUBJECT: PANAMANIAN ELECTIONS

SUMMARY: PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF THE AUGUST 6 ELECTIONS FOR COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES INDICATE THAT VOTING WAS HEAVY, WITH A TURN-OUT OF ABOUT 83 PERCENT. FEW INCUMBENTS APPEAR TO HAVE WON RE-ELECTION IN THE PANAMA CITY AREA, BUT FARED BETTER IN COLON, ACCORDING TO EARLY RETURNS. SOME 129 ELECTORAL CHALLENGES HAVE BEEN FILED AND PUBLIC DEMONSTRATIONS WERE MOUNTED IN PROTEST AGAINST TWO OF THE CONTESTED ELECTIONS. END SUMMARY.

1. PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF THE AUGUST 6 ELECTIONS FOR PANAMA'S 505 COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES INDICATE THAT VOTING WAS HEAVY, WITH A NATIONWIDE TURN-OUT OF 83.1 PERCENT. THE SPARSELY POPULATED DARIEN PROVINCE REGISTERED THE LOWEST RATE OF PARTICIPATION, 66.1 PERCENT, WHILE LOS SANTOS PROVINCE REGISTERED THE HIGHEST, 91.7 PERCENT. FIRST DETAILED ELECTORAL RESULTS APPEARED IN THE PRESS AUGUST 10, COVERING PANAMA AND COLON PROVINCES. REPORTED VOTER TURN-OUT WAS 86.7 AND 85.9 PERCENT, RESPECTIVELY. WITHIN PANAMA PROVINCE, PANAMA CITY AND THE NEARBY SAN MIGUELITO URBAN DEVELOPMENT AREA

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ACCOUNTED FOR 283,000 ELIGIBLE VOTERS, OR ABOUT ONE-THIRD OF THE NATIONAL TOTAL, BUT ELECTED ONLY 24 OF THE 505 "COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES" WHO WILL SIT IN THE NATIONAL LEGISLATURE. TWO OF 15 INCUMBENTS SEEKING RE-ELECTION WERE RETURNED FROM PANAMA CITY, 2 OF 4 FROM SAN MIGUELITO. PRELIMINARY RESULTS FROM COLON PROVINCE INDICATE INCUMBENTS FARED BETTER THERE, TAKING 11 OF 40

SEATS. WITH UP TO FIVE CANDIDATES IN EACH RACE, IT COMES AS NO SURPRISE THAT THE ELECTORATE WAS BADLY SPLIT. NOT A SINGLE CANDIDATE FROM THE PANAMA CITY AREA APPEARS TO HAVE WON EVEN A SIMPLE MAJORITY OF VOTES CAST; MOST VICTORS HAD ABOUT ONE-THIRD, WHILE A FEW WON WITH LESS THAN TWENTY-FIVE PERCENT.

2. NATIONWIDE, 129 ELECTION CHALLENGES HAVE BEEN FILED; OF THESE, PERHAPS 70 PERCENT WILL REPORTEDLY BE DISMISSED AS INVALID ON LEGAL TECHNICALITIES. IN THE CAPITAL CITY AREA, PROTESTS AGAINST TWO VICTORIOUS INCUMBENTS LED TO DEMONSTRATIONS AND SOME VIOLENCE. ON AUGUST 9 FIFTY DEMONSTRATORS PEACEFULLY PROTESTED ALLEGED IRREGULARITIES IN THE RE-ELECTION OF ERNESTO CORDOBA IN THE LAS CUMBRES NEIGHBORHOOD. ON THE SAME DAY, IN THE SAN MIGUELITO AREA, A LARGE GROUP BLOCKED TRAFFIC TO DEMAND THAT ELECTIONS BE HELD AGAIN. (CHALLENGES HAVE BEEN FILED AGAINST THREE OF FIVE VICTORS IN SAN MIGUELITO, BUT AN INCUMBENT, DIMAS ALI NUNEZ, APPEARS THE MAIN TARGET.) AFTER DEMANDING TO SEE GEN. TORRIJOS, THE DEMONSTRATORS WERE DISPERSED WITH TEAR GAS AND CLUBS. SEVERAL LOCAL LEADERS WERE ARRESTED. LATER THE DEMONSTRATORS TRIED TO COUNTER-ATTACK WITH ROCKS, AND THE NATIONAL GUARD (GN) SWEEPED THE AREA.

3. IN THE WELL-TO-DO BELLA VISTA SECTION OF PANAMA CITY, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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A HOT RACE HAD DEVELOPED AMONG INCUMBENT ALBERTO PONS, TELEVISION PERSONALITY MAYIN CORREA, AND AN ANNOUNCED OPPOSITION CANDIDATE (ONE OF THE VERY FEW NATIONWIDE), CHRISTIAN DEMOCRAT JOSE ANTONIO SOSSA. PONS WAS GENERALLY CONSIDERED THE GOVERNMENT MAN, BUT MAYIN CORREA RECEIVED LAVISH NEWSPAPER ATTENTION TOWARDS THE END OF THE CAMPAIGN. ON ELECTION EVE HER CANDIDACY WAS ENDORSED BY A GOVERNMENT-INFLUENCED NEWSPAPER. SHE HAS APPARENTLY GAINED A NARROW VICTORY. SOSSA AND PONS ARE BOTH CLAIMING A WIDE VARIETY OF ELECTION IRREGULARITIES.

4. COMMENT: IT IS AT LEAST INTERESTING THAT SO MANY BIG-CITY INCUMBENTS WERE DEFEATED. AS REPORTED EARLIER, HOWEVER, THERE WAS NO CLEARLY DEFINED GOVERNMENT "SLATE", SO THE MORE INTERESTING DEVELOPMENT WILL BE HOW THE GOVERNMENT REACTS TO THE NEW FACES. IT IS WORTH REMEMBERING ONCE AGAIN THAT THOSE ELECTED ARE FIRST AND FOREMOST LOCAL, NOT NATIONAL, REPRESENTATIVES. WHEN ASKED ABOUT HIS REPRESENTATIVE, THE TYPICAL PANAMANIAN IS LIKELY TO MENTION THE INCUMBENT'S SUCCESS IN GETTING STREETS PAVED, GARBAGE COLLECTED, ETC. TO BE EFFECTIVE, SUCH LOCAL LEADERS MUST BE ON ACCEPTABLE TERMS WITH THE

CENTRAL GOVERNMENT. REGARDLESS OF THE CHANGES IN NAMES,
THEREFORE, THE NEW REPRESENTATIVES WILL HAVE EXCELLENT
REASONS FOR COOPERATING WITH THE TORRIJOS ESTABLISHMENT.
JORDEN

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